

BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 12, 1963

Subject: Soviet Troop Withdrawal from Cuba

QUESTION:

Soviet withdrawals from Cuba have been disappointingly slow. Have we had any recent contact on this matter with the USSR and will you raise it with Gromyko if he comes to Washington?

BACKGROUND:

The following remarks on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Cuba were made by the President during his press conference of August 20:

"Question: Mr. President, can you bring us up to date, sir, on the Soviet troop strength in Cuba? Has there been a net reduction in recent weeks and months?

"The President: Yes, there has been a decline in the last -- since my last conference, I think we discussed it about two months ago. The intelligence community judges that there has been a decline, and the primary emphasis of those who remain now is in training, and not in concentrated military units.

"But there are still Russians there, and this is still a matter of concern to us."

SUGGESTED REPLY

We have repeatedly made known to the Soviet Government our views on this matter and will continue to do so.

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September 12, 1963

SUBJECT: Anti Castro Raids Against Cuba

QUESTION: There has been an upsurge in recent weeks of anti-Castro raids in Cuba. Assuming they are not emanating from U.S. territory, what is the U.S. position with regard to these raids? And do you have any information as to whether the raiders are based in Central America, specifically Nicaragua?

CURRENT SITUATION REPORT

The Cuban Government has claimed that there have been several raids against installations in Cuba in recent weeks:

- August 15 - light "pirate plane" bombed Bolivia sugar mill in Camaguey Province.
- August 18 - raiders shelled oil storage tanks at Casilda, Las Villas Province.
- August 19 - raiders attacked sulfo-metal plant at Santa Lucia, Pinar del Rio Province.
- September 5 - two twin engine "pirate" planes with jet cover dropped bombs over Santa Clara, Las Villas Province.
- September 8 - "pirate plane" proceeding from north bombed Brazil sugar mill in Camaguey Province.
- September 8 - anti-aircraft batteries twice opened fire on two "targets" which were approaching the oil refinery at Santiago de Cuba, Oriente Province.
- September 8 - anti-aircraft batteries twice opened fire on "aerial targets" approaching Santa Clara, Las Villas Province.

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The Cuban Government has (a) accused the U.S. Government of responsibility for all these raids, (b) characterized them as the beginning of the execution of a plan of aggression by the U.S. with the participation of some Central American governments, (c) charged the U.S. with duplicity in appearing to pursue peaceful objectives in the Test Ban Treaty while attempting to destroy the Cuban revolution, and (d) warned that repetition of the attacks could "give cause for serious incidents, since the Government of Cuba is not willing to tolerate such pirate acts against our people."

Following a series of Cuban exile hit-and-run raids against Soviet and other ships in Cuban territorial waters, the Departments of State and Justice declared on March 30:

"These attacks are neither supported nor condoned by this Government. The President has pointed out that they may have effects opposite those presumably intended by those who carry them out; that is, they may strengthen the Soviet position in Cuba rather than weaken it, tighten Communist controls rather than loosen them.

"We intend to take every step necessary to insure that such raids are not launched, manned, or equipped from U.S. territory.

"The sympathy of this Government and of the American people is with those Cubans who hope to see their country freed from Communist control. We understand that these raids, reflect the deep frustration of men who want to get back to their homeland, to a Cuba that is independent.

"But this understanding does not mean that we are prepared to see our own laws violated with impunity, or to tolerate activities which might provoke armed reprisals, the brunt of which would be borne by the armed forces of the United States."

On March 21, you said you did not believe these kinds of raids served a useful purpose; that they might strengthen Communist control of Cuba by justifying repressive measures; and that men staging the raids had no connection with the U.S. Government.

On April 3, you said Florida's long coastline made it possible for some people to strike at targets in Cuba but that U.S. policy was to discourage such raids because they are ineffective and in fact may assist Castro in maintaining his control. You mentioned a raid against a Soviet ship and the subsequent press conference staged in Washington by persons associated with those involved. Such raids, you said, give additional incentives for the Soviets to maintain their presence in Cuba and could result in reprisals against American ships. "I think that when these issues of war and peace hang in the balance, that the United States Government and authorities should -- and when American territory is being used -- should have a position of some control in the matter." You went on to say that you did not want to criticize men who are anxious to see their island free but contrasted their action with ex-prisoners of the Brigade who have joined the Army. "We distinguish between those actions which we feel advance the cause of freedom and these hit and run raids which we do not feel advance the cause of freedom and we are attempting to discourage those."

SUGGESTED POINTS IN REPLY

1. The U.S. position with regard to raids issuing from U.S. territory is clear. I refer you to the joint State-Justice Department statement of March 30 and my own comments at that time. The position taken at that time stands.
2. As to raids that may take place from other countries, these, of course, are beyond the scope of our controls. I would not want to speculate on the location of bases which may be involved in these alleged raids.
3. We respect and share the Cuban exiles' desire to see their country truly free. We do not believe, however, that such indiscriminate attacks as those involved in the reported air intrusions over Cuba actually represent a real blow at Castro or advance the cause.